1:Layard E-5 (1914-1915) 1942
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CHAPTER II

THE SMALL ISLANDS AND VAO

133 THE term "Small Islands" is a pidgin-English one used by the natives of the coral islets fringing the north-east coast of Malekula in contrast to "Big Island," which they use in reference to the Malekulan mainland. These islets, each of which contains less than half a square mile of land, are due to outcrops of what Darwin calls a "fringing reef," caused by the action of coral polyps on the coast of land that has been raised by successive upward movements due to volcanic action. I have already called attention to the coral terraces on the adjacent mainland bearing witness to successive upheavals of this nature. Such fringing reefs are caused by the action of salt water, which encourages the growth of coral, combined with the contrary action of fresh water flowing down from the hills, which, together with the sediment which this fresh water brings with it, checks the activities of the polyps. The result is the formation of strong coral on the outer edge, combined with the decay or less vigorous growth of those parts nearest the land. Owing to the seaward flow of fresh water, in which coral will not grow, and to other causes, the outer edge breaks up into islands, between which and the land mass there forms a channel of varying depth. Owing to the causes outlined above, each Small Island has a good beach facing the channel, rises slightly towards the centre, and on the outer seaward side ends abruptly with a more or less elevated escarpment of coral rock. It is important to remember this formation for the bearing it has on the social organisation of these islands, owing to the greater desirability of the side facing the mainland and the bleakness of that facing the open sea.

There are seven of these islands, Vao, Atchin, Wala, Rano, Norsup, Uripiv and Uri, the inhabitants of which, together with those of the adjoining promontories of Pinalum and Tautu, form a loosely knit cultural unit of sufficient cohesion to refer to themselves collectively as "Sea Folk" (*mwere n'das* in the language of Atchin) on account of their maritime situation and their common use of sea-going canoes, which the inhabitants of the mainland villages apart from the promontories do not possess. Each island had at the time of my visit a population some 400 strong, with the exception of Uri, which was then almost depopulated, and Norsup, which is very small. Despite their small numbers and the loose cultural bond already mentioned, however, the inhabitants of each island speak separate languages (excepting Wala and Rano, which, being very close

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APPENDIX I

POPULATION AND MALE NAMES

Writing in 1892, Père Vidil, the first Roman Catholic missionary on Vao, made a rough census of the population, which he found to consist of about 400 men, a still greater number of women and a host of children,[1] and it is presumably on this evidence that Godefroy later estimated that the island may at one time have supported a population of perhaps 1000, but never more. By the year 1910 it had shrunk in Godefroy's opinion to about 600.[2] Speiser estimates the population in about 1912 to have been roughly 500,[3] and Harrisson made a census in 1935 that amounted to 406 with a sex ratio of 126 males per 100 females.[4]

On the other hand, in an undated letter, Godefroy estimates the population of the five main Small Islands at—

Vao . .	390 inhabitants.	Rano . .	250 inhabitants.
Atchin . .	300 „	Uripiv . .	100 „
Wala . .	300 „		

The only figure which I can compare with these is my own census on Atchin showing 401 men, women and children in 1914.

The problem of depopulation in the New Hebrides as a whole has been discussed by various authors and cannot be gone into here.[5]

Godefroy attributes the general decline to:

(*a*) Contact with Europeans;

(*b*) Indentured labour;

(*c*) Introduced diseases;

(*d*) Alcoholism.

It will be noted that (*a*) covers all the others. Though alcoholism has taken its toll in other parts of the group, it was not a serious factor on Vao while I was there, though it may have become so later. He says that, according to reports of the old men, many died of famine (probably due to a particularly bad hurricane destroying their crops or preventing access to the mainland) about 100 years ago.[6]

[1] Douceré, p. 153.
[2] Godefroy, 1, 1933, pp. 34-5.
[3] Speiser, 1, p. 57.
[4] Written communication.
[5] See particularly Rivers, *Essays on the Depopulation of Melanesia*, Cambridge, 1922; Baker, *Depopulation in Espirito Santo, New Hebrides*: *Man*, LVIII, January-June 1928; Harrisson, 2, pp. 261 ff.
[6] Godefroy, 1, 1933, pp. 51-2.

2: Layard E-5 (1914-1915) 1936
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liminary grades in order to enhance the dignity of those few who had reached the highest rank. In Atchin, on the other hand, owing to the communal nature of the rite and the mutual help afforded by every member of the village community to every other member, a contrary process was at work, the lower grades being already in process of elimination before the arrival of the white man. With the acquisition of the new wealth this process became speeded up, with the result that by the time of my visit they had all disappeared, so that each and every man, youth, and male piccaninny on the island who was capable of sacrificing a pig belonged to the grade *Mal*, much to the chagrin of those in other communities who had taken a lifetime achieving it. Even the older men on Atchin felt somewhat abashed by the general levelling-up, and, in order to assert their own superiority, a new supernumerary grade had been invented, called *Mel-teg*, literally "The *Mal* who stays at home," referring to the vows of abstinence taken after the *Maki*. It is amusing and significant to note that, according to Mr. Harrisson, the young men have again asserted their equality and that now most men on Atchin possess the title *Mel-teg*, and apparently for the moment, in this respect at any rate, democracy has reasserted itself, for there is no record of any further supernumerary grade.

The younger generation of natives made use of the white man's coming not only in the direction of freeing themselves from the domination of the older men. With the acute dramatic sense which is the essence of their culture they had also made up to some extent for other deprivations which the white man had brought about by using both him and his inventions for the enhancement of their already rich ritual life. Pantomimic representations of various aspects of the white man's activities had been incorporated into the dramatic repertory of the *na-leng* plays and dances, muskets were used to heighten the effect of ritual combats during the sex-initiatory expedition to Omba, into the more serious initiation rites on Atchin, in which hoaxes are performed on the initiates, more than one white man's *tour de force* was incorporated, and many of the masks and images were made lurid by means of Reckett's blue.

It is however significant to note that, even in the case of such a wide departure from native tradition as the abandonment of the manufacture of their own long-distance canoes in favour of white men's whale-boats, the old consecration rites were still continued. At one such consecration rite at which I was present over sixty valuable tusked boars were sacrificed, and the supreme sacrifice was that of a bullock, obtained from a trader, for which all the complicated sacrificial ritual was performed; while in the pantomimic dances the skulls of a bullock and two goats were used as masks.

One final word as to the causes of depopulation. At the time of my visit the population was on the decline. Of physical causes the chief was, as has been seen, the introduction of the musket which turned comparatively harmless semi-ritual combats into lethal battles. Second to this, the introduction of diseases, mainly of dysentery, which wiped out whole families. As to the psychological causes put forward by Rivers and others but denied by Mr. Harrisson, all I am able to say quite definitely is that there was at that time a general belief among the older men and some of the young ones that the race was doomed. The old men remembered the day when native culture was the highest achievement of the human race as they conceived it. The appearance

2: Layard E-5 (1914-1915) 1936
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of the white man made this position untenable, and they could conceive no possible compromise. If the white man stayed they must die out, as had so many of their neighbours. Some of the young men also said, "What, if this be the case, is the use of rearing children?" and there is no doubt that among this section of the community abortions were common, as pedigrees bear out in the clear diminution of the number of births. There was however a third section of the community, the younger men who had never known the time before the white man came, who were already born into an atmosphere of inevitable compromise, for whom the glamour of the white man's superior material civilization was tempered with a shrewd sense of his weaknesses and some knowledge of how to deal with him. These were the men who were bent on rehabilitating Atchin culture, while at the same time incorporating into it such new elements as seemed not to conflict too greatly with it. One such was Lawak, then my chief friend and informant, now, according to Mr. Harrisson, the most influential man on the island, who had spent two years of his youth in the French penal settlement of Noumea, who was one of the few young men of my day to take to him two wives, and who, his first wife being sick, himself reared her baby son by feeding him on the juices of fruits; nor shall I ever forget his delight when the boy first began to run. I must confess that in 1914, while admiring their efforts, I had little hope in their ultimate success. Time has shown otherwise. The population has increased and is increasing now. It is to such men as Lawak who, through knowledge of the white man and how to deal with him, had hope in the future but at the same time preserved their independence of mind and love of their own culture, that the present increase in population and renaissance of culture is due.

The author is hoping to publish a detailed account of the social organization, religion, language, music, and sea-faring activities of the inhabitants of the small islands off the north-east coast of Malekula, in a series of volumes entitled, 'Stone Men of Malekula.' The first volume, dealing with the island of Vao, is to appear this autumn.

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3: Harrisson N-5 (1934-1935) 1936
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Tattoo is elaborately humanistic in the Banks Islands; simpler on Pentecost, with occasional spirals and circles; intricately angular on Omba; on Santo simple geometric patterns, almost entirely non-representative. Scarification replaces tattoo in Sakau. On Malekula I have not seen tattoo.

I found that chance, individuality, error, misinterpretation, war, and wind were most important in determining the cultures I investigated; these are allowed no place anywhere in Rivers' 'History of Melanesian Society' (1914). I have also much evidence for the spread of ideas and objects ahead or independent of the people who originally brought them, often accidentally, to one point. There is little evidence to be found for logical coherent waves of the Riversian "*kava* people" type into this part of Melanesia. And whereas movements have generally been considered to pass from the north southwards, there is no doubt that the two most obvious diffusions which I have been able to trace spread westward from Omba, which was almost certainly effected from the east, and northward from Efate through Emae, Tongoa, Hambi to south Malekula; important culture traits in Santo have largely been derived from Malo to the south. After studying the literature and the people themselves, I have come to the conclusion that the culture of south Melanesia is even more complex than had previously been supposed. Far more data are needed to make any broad generalizations valuable. There are still whole islands about whose culture we know nothing. The forthcoming work of Layard, and to a lesser extent my own, will I think demonstrate that some of the north Malekulan and Atchin traits can be associated with ritual or belief all over the Pacific and in much remoter parts of the world. These islands seem to have received the last flickers and backwashes from every step in world evolution: that is true for the period of white influence too.

Present position in the Group

The white is in general disliked by the native: mission natives sometimes like their missionaries. What respect black has for white is founded on what the former calls the latter's "cleverness"—the things he can make, his tinned sardines and launch engines. Among many peoples now, especially on Omba, Efate, Tongoa, and Nguna, there is a dawning determination to have some say in their own affairs. Now the natives have no control of any sort; they know they are being underpaid or misused. Their lack of unity has been and is the main obstacle to reform. Land in particular will be a future problem. On some islands the French claim more land than there is above water; they vigorously curtail the expansion of the native in every direction, and notably on Aore and Malo have driven out whole villages. Among the bushmen anti-white feeling is generally strong but passive; for here there is little concern with the small world outside. And whereas the bushmen are without exception decreasing, the coastal peoples in many parts, and invariably when close to a missionary and his medicines, are increasing.

On the basis of a very detailed study (to be published elsewhere) I am convinced that a hundred and fifty years ago there were not less than one million natives in the group; there are now about forty-five thousand. "Civilization" has crept on, though perhaps more slowly than anywhere else in the world. It is the missionary and the germ that has made the coast safe for civilization.

3: Harrisson N-5 (1934-1935) 1936
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Big Nambas

From the first missionary, John Williams, murdered in 1839, until the present day, these devoted men, working according to their own lights, meeting often with sudden death, have been the only influence for good and sanity of any sort; even had they accomplished nothing, the missionaries would be the best people in island history. It was not always the Mission who converted the people or disrupted the native civilization. It was the chaos of endless new unknown diseases, the fundamental cultural upset due to iron and firearms. In seeking protection from these and from the other whites who brought them, the natives came to the missionary. The early records of the group are a ghastly list of introduced diseases—scarlet fever, measles, consumption, smallpox, phthisis, gonorrhoea, whooping cough, influenza, diphtheria, meningitis—all fatal to these people. The population, particularly where it was much in contact with whites, was decimated. Their culture was based on a certain speed, rhythm, and age-cycle; the sudden death of artist, magician, or chief upset the whole. The old beliefs, ancient gods, countermagics, and native herbs, could do nothing; so they turned to the white man's god, who must be stronger than their own. The new trend among the missionized people, as it gathers internal momentum, shows signs of turning against its instigators, the white missionaries. So far experiments in founding a native-run church have regularly failed. The new motive power is economic rather than religious; some revival of passive heathenism is an ingredient. The price of copra, regulated by the combines far away in Europe, has become in many ways the determining factor. During the period of my visit copra prices reached their lowest level. The missionized natives have become dependent on their coconuts to earn them money for knives, calico, tobacco, belts, even bread, rice, and tinned meat—the substitutes for "heathen" things that have become extinct through mission influence. Low prices mean little money and a standard of living reduced below the level of the last thirty years, in many ways below that of the heathen bushmen. This annoys the native against the white, who has created these demands and will not satisfy them; and a shirt has become the essential symbol of a mission native, to such an extent that without a shirt he feels no longer Christian. I doubt if the group has within sight an important economic future for the white man, despite the recent optimistic accounts of Archimbaud (1927) and Lop (1933). The Chinese and Japanese are rapidly gaining economic power; they may find in these fever- and cyclone-ridden islands an important outlet. Half-castes are not numerous. French ones rank equal with pure Frenchmen as citizens, and run many French plantations.

Recently the administration have to some extent changed their policy, for example in relation to trouble within the native community and in appointing me to pacify the Big Nambas. The native will therefore expect more arbitration in future; if it is not provided, the administration will be discredited, to the danger of all whites.

So the age-long cycle goes on. The native population was never stable, either in culture or in numbers. When Quiros came the population was about at a peak in the north; now it has reached a trough, on the interminable up and down of all races. It is time for the Melanesian to climb again. He is climbing wherever conditions are at all favourable. And the vital question